

# Students keep on reading in Battle of the Books

By Rich Rautenstrauch  
Wallowa County Chieftain

For over a decade the people of Wallowa County have been celebrating their children at the annual Battle of the Books. The latest battle, held in the Enterprise High School Commons room Friday evening, March 13, is in its eleventh year and this year there were more kids in it than ever with another standing-room-only crowd.

For Enterprise City Librarian Denine Rautenstrauch, event organizer, the evening was more than she could ask for. "I am so grateful for the support the Battle of the Books receives. There's so many people involved and everybody does their jobs and we have an event like this that grows."

The Battle of the Books is rather like the old College Bowl show on TV. Students in each of the three main Wallowa County schools, Enterprise, Joseph and Wallowa, read four books chosen by librarians and then get together after a few months of reading and are questioned on what they have read. A stage is set up with buzzers for the kids to ring in and the show begins.

The class range for the battle is second through sixth grades. Sets of books are distributed to each city's public library and to each of the three participating schools for the students to read. The kids check out the books and share them with one another. For the younger grades, easier books are available, while older kids may be reading chapter books.

All of the public librarians are involved in the event:

Genene Kingsford of Joseph, Debbie Lind of Wallowa, and Enterprise's Rautenstrauch. Enterprise school librarian Jessica Anderson, Wallowa school librarian Heather Howard and individual teachers and volunteers from each community work with the kids and hold practice sessions for the students.

Cookies and certificates are handed out to each student who participates. Medals are awarded to each member of a winning class. This year in the second grade competition there was a three-way tie and about 30 kids came off the stage to each receive a bronze on a lanyard.

Certificates and medals are funded by donations from the Hurricane Creek Grange and an individual, Bernice Bernotat of Joseph. Linda Kruger Ebbert is Rautenstrauch's right-hand person in helping organize the event.

For Denine it's all about the kids. She loves to watch them line up in front of the stage. She also relishes the noise and the excitement the kids bring to the event. She added, "One of my favorite parts of the battle is when it is first being set up and the books are delivered to the library. The kids come racing into the library. They're all excited and they want all the books now. With the books having to be distributed right, this doesn't happen, but it's fun to watch. It's just great to see the kids excited about reading."

County Commissioner Susan Roberts also helped, keeping score at the Battle of the Books.



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

The Enterprise Outlaws battled for second place in the fifth grade contest. All of the students participating wear donated Battle of the Book shirts to the event.



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

Wallowa fifth graders, from left, Lane Tanzey, Skylar Norton, Dylan Jennings and Ryder Goller contemplate Willie Gibbs' answer to one of the questions in the battle. The all-boy team won, celebrating with chest bumps afterwards.



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

Joseph fourth graders took home the gold, winning their grade level in this year's Battle of the Books. Pictured, front row from left: Brandon Charlton, Zachery Powers, Keelan McBurney, James Burney, Kale Ferguson and Blade Suto. Back row: Maggie Miller, McKinzie Keffer, Rachel Lester, Mary Thiel and Molly Curry.

## Business advice now comes through BMCC

By Rocky Wilson  
Wallowa County Chieftain

A free and confidential business counseling service that's coached a total of 892 local entrepreneurs and small businesses in the past 14 years has gone away, but its replacement, according to retiring Wallowa County Business Facilitator Catherine Matthias, "is a nice step forward for the county."

Since Oct. 20, 2014, when a program only headed through the years by Myron Kirkpatrick and Matthias ceased operations, the Small Business Develop-

ment Center (SBDC), based at Blue Mountain Community College, in Pendleton, has expanded its similar free and confidential business coaching program to include Wallowa County.

Both Matthias and Art Hill, executive director of the BMCC SBDC, agree the new arrangement, when totally put in place, will provide even more benefit to entrepreneurs and small business owners in Wallowa County than previously available through Wallowa County's late Business Facilitation program.

The next piece in the puzzle to be put in place, says Hill, will be the hiring of a part-time business facilitator who'll live in and work exclusively in Wallowa County. And that will happen soon, says Hill, adding that applications for the 10-20 hour-per-week job have closed and the interview process will begin within the next few weeks.

Making SBDC an improved

resource for those from Wallowa County desiring to enter or enhance their effectiveness in the business world, says Hill, is SBDC's vast network of statewide and national resources and professionals easily available to them through modern telecommunications.

Like the 14-year-old Wallowa County Business Facilitation effort that's met so much success through the years, Hill says the most valuable component of SBDC "is advising business owners in one-on-one sessions. ... You can offer workshops until the cows come home," he adds, but nothing can match the personal touch of addressing clients individually.

Hill says accessing the services of the SBDC is as simple as phoning the center in Pendleton at 541-276-6233 to schedule an appointment with a local advisor.

As of today, the BMCC SBDC focuses its efforts primarily on Wallowa, Baker and Uma-



Art Hill

tilla counties, says Hill, but once the newly trained advisor begins working in Wallowa County, seven SBDC advisors and Hill will serve a geographical area stretching from Boardman to Baker, and from Milton-Freewater to Wallowa Lake.

Wallowa County Business Facilitation served 526 new businesses since its 2001 launch by Myron Kirkpatrick, according to the Wallowa County Chamber of Commerce. Matthias took over the part-time role from Kirkpatrick in 2011.

"The biggest thing I learned during those years simply was to listen," said Matthias. "It takes time for people to get their story out." Another valuable lesson she learned and wished to share was to stand back "and let them take ownership of their own project."

An author of six children's books published when she was a single mother in the 1980s, Matthias says she's now writing children's book No. 7 and enjoying her time while doing so.

The former facilitator expresses no anxiety about clients of hers that have been handed off to SBDC. "It's almost better for (Hill) to take them," she says.

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